

THE SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF THE COMMUNITY

should be declined by saying, 'God compensates me in a better way'. 000

The following three instances are concrete situations showing the working of the social structure. The first is the installation of a new corn mill by all the clans in the village to bring to an end the monopoly of the already existing privately owned mill. The rough estimates were divided into 24 kirats (parts), each section responsible for collecting the money equivalent to its 12 kirats.¹ In the second process of distribution, each section divides its share amongst the clans, and the head of each clan is responsible for collecting his share from family heads; by dividing his kirats into sahms, the people of his clan could buy a minimum of one-tenth of a sahm. No section or clan could be helped or its shares be taken by another. It was interesting to listen to the village crier calling out the names of the clans and the two sections, to induce haste in collecting the money. 607
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Such procedure was followed for repairing the village mosque. In this case the question was not so much that of collecting money, as of recruiting the men to bring stone, water, straw, etc., for the repairs; and this was also dealt with on the same structural basis. 607
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The third instance was the allocation of new building land to the village, which was also first divided into two sections; then each section was divided into equal parts amongst its clans, which in turn had to divide its share among the families. 607
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The system of village government reflects a combination of central authority agents and the village social organization. The village head is an official called 'Omda' who used to be elected from a list of five people who own not less than 10 feddans. Two years ago, the law was changed and the Omda is now elected from amongst thirteen people who own enough land to make them eligible. The job is unpaid, and it is reckoned as a privilege to be elected. The Omda's seniority is something like the medieval *primus inter pares*. He represents the village on official occasions. One of his traditional and honorary functions is to receive guests, travelers, and government officials in his guest house. Silwa has also two unpaid 'Sheikhs' each representing one of the two sections of the village and thus commonly referred to as 'Sheikh hissa'; these are also elected from amongst those who are eligible (minimum requirement was 5 feddans, now being relaxed). The Omda and the two sheikhs settle the disputes that arise in the village, usually with the aid of Arab councils, or with the help of people whom they select on different occasions. Each sheikh is primarily concerned with the problems of his section (hissa). 621
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The central government is represented by the police headquarters with a police officer or constable in charge and policemen and ghafeers. While the policemen are always from outside the village, the ghafeers are villagers, put up usually from different clans, acting as the Omda's messengers, as well as the local agents between the village and the police headquarters. The feddan has 24 kirats, and each kirat 12 sahms. 625
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ADOLESCENCE, SEX AND MARRIAGE

witnessed, and which is typical as there is hardly any variation in the form it takes. 585

A is a boy who had recently been rejected for military conscription, on grounds of poor eyesight; he is known to be a good farmer, and a great help to his father. He was the eldest son in the family and felt that his father delayed his marriage unduly as 'fathers usually get their first sons married as early as possible'. After he was rejected for conscription, this boy could no longer bear any delay. As the custom is, he sent 'messengers' to persuade his father to get him married, as 'everybody was telling him that it was high time he got married'. On the other hand, his father was reluctant; he was in a quandary whether or not to proceed with this project; he was apprehensive that the lad might not be so devoted to his work after marriage, yet he felt the time was ripe for getting his son married, otherwise the boy might at any time 'bring disgrace' on the family. The lad's last appeal to the father was through a messenger who pointed out to the father that if the necessary steps for marriage were not instantly undertaken, the boy might think of leaving the village to find some work elsewhere. The father gave his consent, realizing that he would have to get his son married: 'There will be more "baraka" if it is done soon.' The actual preparations would start in a month's time, when the harvest was ready. 582 702

Now a dilemma of choice faced the parents, as there were two girls of marriageable age in the family; one was the daughter of the boy's maternal uncle and the other of the paternal uncle. It was partly because of the mother's influence, and partly because of the boy's personal inclinations that his parents decided to marry him to his maternal cousin. This affronted the boy's paternal uncle, as his daughter, according to custom, had precedence over that of the maternal uncle. This man asked the lad's father for an 'Arab verdict' on the matter, and a formal gathering of relatives and some neighbours brought apparent reconciliation between the two brothers. They all agreed that 'although the boy was to get married into his mother's family the oil was still preserved in the house (zaitakum fi baitakum) and that he was not marrying a stranger'. Yet this slight was not forgotten and caused some tension and vituperation between some of the paternal and maternal relatives during the celebration of the ceremony. 584

The date of writing the marriage contract was then fixed. The father of the boy and his relatives and friends went to the house of the girl's father asking for her hand for their son in the usual phrase of 'talbeen al gurb' (literally 'we desire to get closer to you'). Neither the boy nor the girl was present during this gathering for writing the contract. Before the contract was written, the registrar (mashoon)² enunciated the following, which was 584

¹ This remark of the father indicated his social obligation for the marriage of his son; its counterpart is for the son to accept his father's arrangement for his marriage.

² The 'mashoon' is a learned man who keeps the official register of marriages and divorces. He is officially appointed after an examination in the Koran and the Sharia; it is an unpaid job. 697

INTER-VILLAGE FIGHTS

asked them why they had behaved so badly I was met by the friendliest grins.

On another occasion I happened to be present at a fight which took place at the annual festival held in honour of a local sheikh. One of the villages mentioned above again engaged in battle with the people in whose village the festival was taking place. The chief guard of that village, a hospitable man as well as an excellent disciplinarian, invited me to visit his house after I had seen the various shows which are an important feature of such festivities.



FIG. 58. ATTITUDE OF COMBATANTS IN INTER-VILLAGE FIGHTS

His house had a good balcony overlooking the whole fair, and, as the weather was very hot, I was only too glad to be able to watch what was going on from so sheltered and comfortable a position. Suddenly, without apparent warning, out came the *nabābīt* (plural of *nabbūt*), and the fun began. The head guard, however, is skilful in using the *kurbāg*, and he was soon in the thick of it, slashing right and left, accompanied by a soldier, similarly armed, who had been sent as my bodyguard. Presently the combatants fled helter-skelter down side-passages—anywhere, in fact, to get out of reach of the well-directed lashes of the whips! Peace again reigned, but not for long. A crowd composed of members of the two antagonistic villages again collected, and sticks once more had free play. This fight was stopped in the same manner as the previous one, but there were two or three repetitions before a final armistice was enforced.

622 the post, by the law of 1895, unless he is owner of at least ten feddans. His appointment is usually preceded by rivalries which may turn into brawls, and followed by feuds that often end in death.

The *omda*, however, knows very well how to protect and even avenge himself, for he alone transmits information to the *maamûr*, and has sole charge of twenty or more night-watchmen (*ghaffirs*). Indeed, his chief duty is to ensure public security in the village and the surrounding country rather than to concern himself with improvements or with public health, to which he gives no more thought than those under him.

He represents his village district (*nahya*) before the *maamûr*, is responsible for any crimes committed in it which are reported, supports the *sarraf* in the business of tax-collecting, sees to the levy of men required for any given task, takes charge of the post and telephone, controls the carrying of arms, reports the outbreak of disease among people or cattle, and records births and deaths.

622 He is not paid by the Government, but apart from the
692 value of the prestige attaching to his office, he has various
624 privileges. He is exempt from taxation on five feddans,
from forced labour, and from military service. This applies
both to himself and to his sons. By custom, if not by right,
the position of *omda* remains the privilege of one family.
If the village is large and important, the *omda* is assisted
by sheikhs, with whom he deliberates before giving his
decisions. One of my pupils, the son of an *omda* in Upper
Egypt, describes the procedure as follows: 'My father has
25 *ghaffirs* under his orders. From 5 p.m. to 5 a.m. they
are on watch in the fields, with the exception of two who
622 remain on guard at the *omda's* house. If there is a trial,
692 it is conducted thus: The *omda* sits down in his *montaza*,
695 or outer garden, with a few sheikhs (men of some age and
responsibility). The two disputants appear, and each
gives his explanation of the matter. The *omda* gives his
judgment, and tries to reconcile them. If they are not con-
[681] tent to abide by his decision, he locks them up in jail until the
following day and then sends them to the *markaz* with two
ghaffirs.'

622 An *omda* may imprison for 24 hours, and impose a fine
692 up to 15 piastres. There is no school in the village. The

x⁵³⁹ 5 They will carry thee to the villages of the Rarbiye,
 593 And some fine day thou wilt be without thy children.
 464 So stay by thy rowing,
 Whilst thou stirrest up the flowing sand."

2. 'ange is a large sail-boat, almost exactly resembling the better known dahabiye, excepting that it is smaller. Compare [501] Wilkinson, *Modern Egypt* I p. 209 ff. (cut *ibid.* p. 195).

3. Compare note on No. 96, l. 3.

4. 3. eš-šar'iye, namely: the east and el-rarbiye: the west, [103] are two provinces of the Delta, of which the capitals are Zaḡāziq (Za'āzi') and Tanṭa.

5. In pushing off, the oars stir up the sand. This is Maḥ-mūd's explanation, but I have a suspicion that this line has [114] been corrupted. Perhaps a picture has slipped in from the excavations, where the fine, running sand often makes the work a task of the Danaïds.

132.

An Evidence of Favor.

x⁵³² A certain working-girl boasts to her companions. The
 832 inspector has not given the pretty girl a pomegranate without
 [824] a purpose. The pomegranate is a sign for love.

El-ḥoli iddāni rummāne
we-ramāni be-'ēno en-na'sane.

The inspector has given me a pomegranate
 And has winked at me with his sleepy eye.

● [624] 1. Ḥoli is the inspector of an estate of some size.